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Received - 2022-01-03 02:40:41 PM
Control Number - 51841
ItemNumber - 11

January 3, 2021

RE: Request for Public Hearing related to the Public Utility Commission (PUC) Project No. 51841- emergency operations

The February 2021 Winter Storm Uri blackout profoundly affected many Texans with disabilities who rely on electric powered durable medical equipment (DME) for their survival and wellness. TCDD requests the opportunity to discuss the Public Utility Commission (PUC) Project No. 51841, a rule relating to utility emergency operations plans that are critical to this population.

A study conducted in 2021 by Disability Rights Texas demonstrated that emergency response for Texans with disabilities is inadequate, including those designated as critical care and chronic condition customers on utility registries. The EOP review underway in this project is an opportunity to identify and prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable customers and ensure cross collaboration among appropriate agencies to achieve inclusive emergency planning practices to sustain community lifelines and mitigate potential dangers during power outages.

In response to this disaster, the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities joined the Texas State Independent Living Council and Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities gathered stakeholders in a cross-disability *Durable Medical Equipment Power Task Force* to identify solutions for meeting emergency power needs for individual users of DME living in the community. Other members include: AARP Texas, The Arc of DFW Area, Disability Rights Texas, Texas Legal Services Center, Texas Medical Equipment Providers (TexMEP), Texas Parent to Parent, stakeholders in healthcare and emergency response, disability advocates, and other agencies serving Texans with disabilities. The Task Force filed planning recommendations on July 5, 2021 in Project No. 51812¹ anticipating a commission review and inclusion as part of this rulemaking.

TCDD requests a public hearing on January 11, 2022 to hear the experiences of individuals and family members who were impacted by prolonged power outages. This testimony will support PUC to develop responsive policy and new requirements to protect customers medically dependent on electricity during power outages.

This public hearing should incorporate specific accommodations for individuals with disabilities to participate. For example, the hearing must be held in an accessible meeting location that has sufficient accessible parking near downtown parking garages with working elevators. It is also recommended to have virtual options for members of the public to participate and to submit public comment – especially for those who use durable medical equipment who may be immune compromised and are not able to travel to this meeting due to the public health pandemic and increased risk status in Austin currently set at Stage 4.

Respectfully Submitted,

Beth Stalvey, MPH, PhD, Executive Director
Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities
Beth.Stalvey@tcdd.texas.gov

¹ http://interchange.puc.texas.gov/Documents/51812_223_1137673.PDF